

German intelligence agency plans major expansion of spying powers

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The German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) is planning a massive expansion of its surveillance operations. As part of efforts to “catch up” with US and UK spy agencies, the BND projects include plans to crack Internet codes and monitor online activity in real time.

According to media reports, the BND has requested 28 million euros for next year from the German parliament for its planned “Strategic Initiative Technique” (SIT). The agency is counting on additional financing of 300 million euros for the project by 2020. The SIT will allow the BND to spy on the Internet in real time and expand its activities in the field of cyber-espionage.

According to secret planning documents cited by *Der Spiegel* magazine, the agency aims to “cooperate on an equal footing with the leading Western intelligence services,” namely the American NSA and the British GCHQ. As documented by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden, the US and UK intelligence agencies have the most extensive surveillance technologies targeting the communications of virtually everyone on the planet.

The BND is working full speed to develop its own “skills,” and, according to *Der Spiegel*, is prepared to employ “problematic methods” in the process. Part of SIT is a project code-named “Nitidezza” (in Italian: sharpness)—a program intended to crack and evaluate encrypted codes such as SSL and HTTPS.

BND head Gerhard Schindler intends to spend 4.5 million euros for the program over the next five years. These funds will be used to purchase so-called “Zero Day Exploits,” i.e. software weak-spots, which can be used to penetrate an operating system in order to detect and manipulate data. *Der Spiegel* reports on a market of knowledge of such vulnerabilities, in which, “autocrats and dictators, but also corporations can shop,” and

writes: “It has been long suspected, but up to now not proven, that secret services are the best clients on the legal and the illegal market.”

The Snowden revelations make clear that the NSA expends tens of millions annually for access to “Zero Day Exploits,” which can be used for attacks in cyber warfare scenarios. One example was the US and Israeli use in 2009 and 2010 of the Stuxnet virus, which exploited weak-spots in the control systems of Iran's nuclear program.

On Monday, the German government acknowledged that the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI) was cooperating with the French company Vupen that specializes in the trade of “Zero Day Exploits.” Government spokesman Steffen Seibert also confirmed the plans to upgrade the German secret services. “It is true that the BND is planning to strengthen its existing technical basis,” he explained—a euphemism for the nationwide surveillance of the population.

In similar manner to the NSA, the BND is also preparing to spy on the Internet in real time. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, it is planning a prototype for monitoring social networks such as Facebook by June of next year. The aim is to “first evaluate data from Twitter and Blogs.”

Under the headline “Cleverer espionage,” the latest issue of the magazine *International Politics* (IP), which is published by the government-affiliated German Council on Foreign Relations, reported that “social media is to be targeted more” in Germany. In addition to the BND, the German Army has also launched a program “under the name ‘evaluating knowledge from public sources,’ which is aimed at evaluating data available in Facebook.”

The upgrading of the secret services and the army is directly connected to the renewed turn by Germany to

aggressive world power politics.

In another IP article, Peter Neumann, Professor of Security Studies at King's College in London, writes: “If Germany wants to play a larger role in the world there is no way round an expansion of its capacity.” More is expected from Germany “than was the case 20 years ago. In foreign policy terms, this means that Berlin must be familiar with virtually all regions of the world and take up its own stance; and if it does not participate in conflicts, it should at least make a contribution in the sphere of creative ideas.”

The professor's interpretation of a “contribution in the sphere of creative ideas,” evokes memories of the darkest periods in German history. At the end of his article Naumann goes so far as to state: “In some respects intelligence services in authoritarian states have an easier time than in democratic states—and a career in the former is much more prestigious. The intelligence agents are powerful people who belong to the elite of a country, can determine policy and are feared. As a high-Mukhabarat official in Egypt, one is an incredibly important man. Not at all comparable to a BND department head who is not even allowed to talk about his work.”

The last time intelligence agents in Germany had a comparable position was under Hitler. The Security Service (SD) was directly subordinate to Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler. His chief Reinhard Heydrich was part of the Nazi elite and one of the most feared men of the Third Reich. The SD not only targeted political opponents and intimidated the population, it was also active in espionage abroad and was complicit in the persecution and mass murder of the Jews.

Behind all their hypocritical talk of democracy and human rights, the German ruling elite is once again contemplating the prospect of a military and police state in order to implement its war plans.



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